

**3/10/2015**

**TESTIMONY: SB 1054: AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA  
SUBMITTED BY:  
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PARENT**

I am writing to ask for your support by voting to pass Education Committee's Senate Bill No 1054: An Act concerning Students with Dyslexia.

I am the parent of two children with Dyslexia who were not properly identified and then did not receive appropriate school intervention by our public schools. I am writing to ask you to vote for change to improve the system for future students with Dyslexia in our public schools in CT.

Possibly the only factor that differentiates the path for my dyslexic children from other families is that we had access to pay for a private independent evaluation and not wait for the public schools to properly identify my children's needs.

My testimony is for all those families who are unable to access a highly qualified specialist and have their children properly evaluated for Dyslexia. Even with this testing the protracted delays in implementing the proper instruction still left my children behind.

In order to understand why we need this bill we need to look at the systems in place that are failing to help our disabled children. The first line of intervention for students struggling with reading is supposed to be SRBI. There's lots of information on the state website about best practices that explains how to use the most current, accurate reading research to teach the struggling reader.

My experience with SRBI was eye opener early on. My son was placed in Tier 2 SRBI in Kindergarten from November- April. The only reason I learned of this was because I requested an eligibility PPT for special education services after getting private testing that confirmed a diagnosis of Dyslexia.

I was shocked to discover that my child was receiving the Tier 2 SRBI intervention for months. It was not noted on my report cards. I was told that because the State Dept didn't mandate that parents are notified of Tier 2 - our district chose not to inform parents in any consistent manner. This is the a systemic failure right at the start of the identification process.. we are reliant on a State Department to enforce that these programs like SRBI are used to to help identify Dyslexics and struggling readers early on.

How can parents partner with schools in the education of their child if the system knows their child is struggling but doesn't inform them?

I suspected my child might be Dyslexic because his sibling and uncle are also Dyslexic so I paid to have private testing. This qualified my child for intensive, daily special education services in Decoding that Spring. Importantly, no one from the school ever referred us to an eligibility PPT.

One year later - the end of first grade after a full year of teacher input that inferred some blame for my child's lack of academic progress was because of his disabilities (implying low abilities) or his attention challenges or he behaviorally was unwilling to try.

We were always told he received "research based, scientific reading intervention" by trained professionals. But upon observation by an independent reading specialist, we discovered that he was not receiving appropriate intervention after all.

My child left public to attend The Windward School, a private school for Dyslexics in White Plains. The teaching team sat us down at the end of his first year to inform us of his significant and remarkable progress.

Particularly in Math where knew he had previously struggled. They told us not only was he not struggling in math, but he had made up 4 grade levels in one year. As measured by a standardized test given at the beginning and at the end of each year. He was actually gifted in Mathematics.

They shared that this was not due to some elaborate or expensive math program for Dyslexics. It was an explicit general ed math program taught in a small group. Just like their reading program - Preventing Academic Failure is also a scaffolded general ed literacy program. Both programs could be in our public schools tomorrow.

My child failed in public schools because the system fails to differentiate instruction. And because our state mandated curriculum shifted to language based math. Thus doubly leaving Dyslexic children behind their typical peers.

In the past, dyslexic children might be able to experience success academically outside of reading - no longer since math is now language based only curriculum.

The public schools do not have to provide differentiated math curriculum as an option to the 20% of their school populations struggling with language based disabilities such as Dyslexia.

I felt awful that day because despite all my advocacy, I recognized how I had failed my child. I held onto the belief that his day wasn't that bad because I thought his struggle was limited to learning to read. I realized in my heart that my child had struggled for years to sit in a desk and pay attention to a curriculum he could not access, designed for him to fail. Needlessly, the public school had wasted four years of his education.

If our teachers were allowed to speak openly, they would tell you they know this is happening every day. That about 20-25% of their students are falling behind due to the

lack of identification and instruction appropriate for the 20% who have Dyslexia and related disorders. But teachers are not allowed to have input and a voice regarding their own curriculum.

It has been my experience that SRBI is not being implemented in Connecticut Public Schools. SRBI in practice is little more than what reading professionals cautioned the State Dept about when it was first proposed. SRBI is being used as an effective delay mechanism by Districts to reduce or limit referrals to evaluate students for eligibility for special education.

Some of you may have read about what is termed “the school to prison pipeline”. This pipeline starts with the failure of SRBI. The phrase captures the trajectory of the struggling student who is left without help. Up to 75% of adults in our prison system have some kind of a language based learning disability that went undiagnosed by the school. The most common of all language based learning disabilities is Dyslexia. This is true across all states including Connecticut.

As taxpayers and parents we should be able to expect that research based policies espoused by the State Dept of Education are actually being monitored and enforced. Every best practice on SRBI list is well written, each policy includes research based measures but it is not being implemented by our schools.

Without the oversight required by the State Dept, why would schools choose to do better? It's time intensive to track students, properly identify and adapt their curriculum to the Dyslexic student.

Routinely parents who file a Complaint are asked to withdraw it by the State Dept of Education who should be protecting the students. This is because usually after filing... Districts then choose to comply with their obligation to the child. This cycle encourages District's and the State to erase any record that a child did not receive the services that were promised.

Our local school District was proven to have not implemented SRBI. No data was collected to track student progress for hundreds of students. This was published in an independent investigation and provided to the State. Taxpaying parents asked the State Dept of Education to step in to improve the District.

Yet the State Department would not mandate any performance measures be enforced by the State Dept to ensure this District would begin to comply with SRBI guidelines moving forward.

Given this abandonment of oversight we can expect our schools will continue to fail the 20% of the student population with Dyslexia if nothing is done by our Legislature to strengthen the law that supports these students.

By passing this bill, you are helping all children with disabilities who don't have a voice. You are speaking for all struggling readers who might be Dyslexic and who go to school every day, marginalized and left out.

It is my hope that by passing this bill, the Legislature will also be sending a message to the State Dept of Education that taxpayers demand better than this - we have a right to expect that the State Dept is providing actual oversight in educating all the students with disabilities in our schools.

Thank you for considering this testimony and I ask you to pass The Education Committee's Senate Bill No 1054: An Act concerning Students with Dyslexia.

Sincerely,

Kit Savage